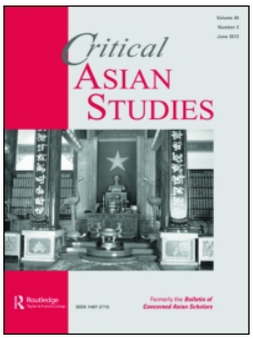

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The Emperor System of the 1900s

by Nakamura Masanori

Introduction

The prewar Japanese state with its emperor system had a set of characteristics not to be found at any time in any other capitalist country. The absolutist emperor system emerged progressively, but not full blown, out of the Meiji Restoration after the suppression of the Movement for Democratic Rights. With the promulgation of the 1889 Meiji Constitution in 1889 and the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1890, it was consolidated. Later, following the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars, the emperor system transformed itself into an imperialist state. Then, during the 1930s, it became, along with Germany and Italy, one of the mainstays of the international fascist movement, thereby dragging the whole nation into the first total war in Japanese history.

That the very same power kept playing so many different historical roles is a rare phenomenon, perhaps without equal in the history of the world.[1] But what exactly did the emperor system mean for the modernization of Japan? That question remains a matter of deep concern for the Japanese people, as evidenced by the growing number of historians who are attempting to reassess the entire course of Japan's modernization and have been conducting new investigations into the modern emperor system since the 1960s. For fifty years students of modern Japanese history have debated the question of whether the Meiji Restoration should be interpreted as a bourgeois revolution or as an emergence of absolutism. Although the controversy is still to be decided academically, it seems safe to say that the scholarly mainstream regards the Restoration as the emergence of absolutist rule.

When it comes to the question of how to interpret the emperor system in the age of imperialism that began in the 1900s, this conventional view divides into two schools of thought. One school maintains that as capitalism developed in Japan the absolutist emperor system changed itself accordingly by acquiring certain bourgeois appearances. Yet the absolutist nature of the system remained essentially unchanged until Japan lost the war in 1945.[2] The other school insists on stressing that the absolutist emperor system actually transformed itself into a bourgeois, imperialistic power.[3] Further controversy then arises among historians over the specific timing of that change.

Unfortunately, neither view succeeds in grasping the real historical significance of the modern emperor system. The former view, which emphasizes the absolutist aspects of the emperor system, fails to recognize in its theory of the state the full significance of a crucial fact: Japan's economic structure changed over time and acquired bourgeois characteristics. In other words, Japanese capitalism completed its industrial revolution between 1890 and 1910, and attained the monopoly capitalist stage in the 1920s. The latter view on the other hand pays attention to the transformation of absolutist into bourgeois power, but slights the absolutist aspects of the political structure. Specifically, it fails to offer a convincing explanation for the fact that the emperor system continued to keep the Japanese people under its absolute, un-democratic control until its defeat in 1945. The question I should like to address here is: how can we overcome the drawbacks inherent in these two views and formulate an alternative theory of the modern emperor system?

1. Shimoyama Saburō, "Kindai tennōsei kenkyū no igi to hōhō" [The Significance of the Methodology for Studying the Modern Japanese Emperor System] in *Rekishigaku Kenkyū* (July 1966).

2. Hoshino Jun, *Shakai Kōseitai ikōron josetsu* [Introduction to the Theory of Transition of Social Formation] (Miraisha, 1969) and *Kokka ikōron no tenkai* [On the Development of the Theory of State Transition] (Miraisha, 1980).

3. Gotō Yasushi, "Kindai tennōseiron" [On the Modern Emperor System] in *Kōza Nihonshi*, Volume 9 (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1971) and "Kokka Kenryoku no Kōzo ni kansuru shosetsu" [Concerning Theories of the Structure of State Power], in *Nihon shihonshugi hattatsushi* (Yūhikaku, 1979).

Establishment of the Basic Organization of the Emperor System, 1900–1910

Japanese historians have been long accustomed to discussing the emperor system mainly in relation to the Meiji Restoration. But when the emperor system first became the subject of scientific inquiry, during the twenties and early thirties, it was discussed in close conjunction with the debate on the strategy for the Japanese revolution then taking place within the Marxist camp. At that time the main focus of analysis was not the power of the emperor system forged during the Meiji Restoration but rather the imperial power then in the process of suppressing the people inside Japan and stepping up colonial aggression abroad. The 1927 and 1932 Theses of the Japanese Communist Party called the emperor system into question not as a power existing in the past era of the Meiji Restoration but precisely as a power existing in the present age of imperialism characterized by highly advanced monopoly capitalism.

Discussing the modern emperor system primarily in relation to the Meiji Restoration abstracts it from its essential character, however, and is tantamount to defining the emperor system as the final form of a feudal, absolutist state existing at the last stage of the dissolution of feudal society. Such a definition implies also that the modern emperor system was incapable of shedding its basic nature as a feudalistic-absolutist state, irrespective of the development and the structural changes which Japanese capitalism experienced subsequently. An argument on revolutionary strategy derived from this view maintained that it would be impossible to advance a thesis of a two-stage revolution unless the emperor system was defined as a quasi-feudal, absolutist state. This formulation betrays an attempt to one-sidedly magnify and fix a historical event by going back to its genesis.

Clearly, we need to view the matter from a different standpoint. Rather than focusing on the emperor system during the stage when its fundamental structure was in the process of formation, or viewing the interwar period exclusively from the perspective of the Meiji Restoration as has been done previously, we must approach the question from the *reverse* direction and ask: when and how was the emperor system, the object of analysis of the 1932 Theses, both "formed" and "established"? Quite unlike the ordinary, commonsense understanding of the word, "establishment" in this sense does not mean that something solid and fixed is brought to completion. Rather, inherent in the logic of establishment is the logic of dissolution, for the very manner in which something is established has inherent in it the moment of contradiction which later determines the way in which it is dissolved. That is, the manner of the emperor system's establishment determined the manner of its dissolution and, conversely, the very manner in which the old regime ended its historical life and dissolved revealed the basic nature of the emperor system at the time of its establishment. In other words, the process of establishment of the emperor system and of its dissolution are closely related to each other, each illuminating and being illuminated by the other. Adopting this standpoint should enable us to correct the distorted image of the emperor system which derived from viewing it only from the perspective of the Meiji Restoration and develop a balanced overview of the historical evolution of the emperor system all the way from its genesis in the Meiji Restoration to its collapse on August 15, 1945.

Japan's military victory in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars and the colonization of Taiwan and Korea represented a significant breakthrough for the ideology of the emperor system, which thereafter began spreading and striking roots deep among the Japanese people. In a sense the emperor system took advantage of the two wars not only in solidifying the military machine—the core of the state machinery—but also in bringing to completion its dominion with regard to ideology.

If we take this standpoint and look at the dissolution of the emperor system as an ancien regime, we must begin by asking the destruction of which component elements of the old order enables us to say that the system as such came to a standstill. Briefly, the characteristic features of the fall of the old order can be summarized in terms of the following six areas: the dissolution of the emperor-led military; the loss of the colonial territories; the dissolution of the zaibatsu; the land reform; the establishment of the new Constitution; and the collapse of the ideology of the emperor system. On the level of the theory of the state there were three decisively important mainstays of the old order among the above features of the emperor system: the Meiji Constitution, the military and the bureaucratic apparatuses, and the ideology of the emperor system (the ideology of domination typically manifested in the Imperial Rescript on Education). On the level of the economic substructure there were three other mainstays: the old colonial territories (Taiwan, Korea and "Manchuria"), the zaibatsu interests, and the parasitic landlord system. This logically leads us to another set of questions. When and how were these six component elements of the emperor system formed? And, given that these six elements did not exist independently of each other but in certain structural relations to one another, what were these binding relations?

Finding answers to these questions will be of decisive importance in identifying the structure which the emperor system had in its formative stage. There is not enough space to make a detailed examination of this matter, but it seems clear that the above six component elements of the emperor system, each structurally joined to the other, formed and took root in the period following the Sino-Japanese War through the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War, in other words, in the period from 1900 through 1910. These six component elements did not stand in parallel with each other at the same level: the military machine and soldiers carried the heaviest weight, playing the role of a *link binding* the other five elements. Moreover, the possession of the colonies pushed the military in the direction of becoming a force with a large degree of independence. More precisely, the colonization of Taiwan in 1895 and Korea in 1910, though having taken place within an institutional framework in which the prerogatives of supreme

command was supposed to be inviolable, actually served as a crucial stimulus to the military to grow larger and become a central political force in its own right. Japan's military victory in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars and the colonization of Taiwan and Korea represented a significant breakthrough for the ideology of the emperor system, which thereafter began spreading and striking roots deep among the Japanese people. In a sense the emperor system took advantage of the two wars not only in solidifying the military machine—the core of the state machinery—but also in bringing to completion its dominion with regard to ideology as well.

As for the Meiji Constitution, the fundamental law of the state which legally epitomized the emperor system, the year of its promulgation, 1899, marked an epoch in Japan's modern history. From that time forward the fundamental shape of the state was determined, though the Constitution did not actually begin to function with political effectiveness until after the Sino-Japanese War. In the Diet prior to the Sino-Japanese War, the Government with its *fukoku kyōhei* (enrich the nation, strengthen the military) policy was always fighting fiercely with the political parties which insisted upon policies of *minryoku kyūyo* (store up national power through alleviation of tax burdens) and *keihi setsugen* (curtail state expenditures). The extent of political control at the disposal of the Meiji Government was thus very unstable.

What about the parasitic landlords and the zaibatsu interests which were the class and economic foundations for the emperor system? The landlord system established itself first as an integral part of the dominant system of rule, followed by the zaibatsu interests which succeeded in forming *Konzerns* in the period between the end of the Sino-Japanese War and the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War. In this period the zaibatsu interests and the landlords formed a bourgeois-landlord bloc. The fundamental structure of the emperor system characterized by the six component elements mentioned above can, therefore, be regarded as having been established during the course of the first decade of this century.[4]

If the above analysis of the structure of the emperor system in its formative stage is correct, then the following question arises: how to define the historical and class nature of this emperor-system-dominated state.

In answering this question, it is necessary first to clarify the characteristics of the Japanese bourgeoisie and landed proprietors who together constituted the class basis of the emperor-system-dominated state, and then go on to discuss the central features of the organizational structure of this state as epitomized by the Meiji Constitution.

Economic and Political Composition of the Capitalist Class

Japanese capitalism simultaneously established itself and completed its transformation into imperialism in the period between 1890 and 1910. Keeping abreast of this change, the capitalist class secured the position of an economically dominant class. Although the bourgeoisie became an economically dominant class, the specific types of capitalists varied from one industrial sector to another depending on the differences in the modes of capital accumulation. Consequently there were differences in the relations they had with the emperor-system-dominated state power. In order to clarify these differences it is necessary to classify capital into several types and identify the corresponding types of Japanese capitalists as well. Anticipating my conclusion, the kinds of capital that existed in the formative period of Japanese capitalism fell into five types: 1) state capital, 2) zaibatsu capital, 3) spinning interests (*bōseki* capital), 4) silk-reeling interests (*seishi* capital), and 5) weaving interests.[5]

Japanese capitalism simultaneously established itself and completed its transformation into imperialism in the period between 1890 and 1910. Keeping abreast of this change, the capitalist class secured the position of an economically dominant class.

State capital consisted not only of "state capital in the form of industrial capital" operating in such government-controlled enterprises as the Army and Navy Arsenals, steel works, railways and telephone and telegram, but also of special banks including the Bank of Japan and other kinds of "state capital in the form of loan capital." Throughout the period of the industrial revolution, these various types of state capital continued to gain in importance. For instance, in mining, manufacturing, and transportation, the share of government-owned enterprises in the total amount of owned capital and reserve fund of both government and private enterprises combined was 29.3 percent in 1897 and 27.2 percent in 1902. In 1907 the government's share leaped to over 50 percent as a result of the extensive nationalization of railways. In banking, too, state capital loomed large. The special banks' share in the total paid-up capital and deposits of special and commercial banks combined increased from 31.4 percent in 1897 to 38.5 percent in 1907. Behind this significant weight held by state capital lay the fact that private industrialists had been able to accumulate only insignificant amounts of funds. Second, in view of the large risk involved in investment in heavy industries, zaibatsu interests chose not to go into these areas. Initially the Meiji Government, driven by the necessity to compete militarily and politically with the advanced imperialist countries and with the countries of Southeast Asia, poured

4. Nakamura Masanori, "Kindai tennōsei Kokkaron" [The State Under the Modern Emperor System] in Nakamura Masanori, ed., *Taikei Nihon Kokkashi I* [Outline of the History of the Japanese State, Modern Period I] (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1975).

5. Nakamura Masanori, "Nihon burujoajii no kōsei" [The composition of the Japanese Bourgeoisie] in Oishi Kaichirō, ed., *Nihon sangyō kakumei no kenkyū* [Studies in the Japanese Industrial Revolution], Vol. 2 (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1975).

enormous amounts of government funds into government-owned enterprises in complete disregard of cost-profit considerations. Thus not only did state capital serve as an important economic base, facilitating the transformation of Japanese capitalism into imperialism, it also provided the essential material conditions for the bureaucrats of the emperor system to attain relative autonomy.

The second variety of capital, zaibatsu capital, was represented by the three largest all-around zaibatsu—Mitsui, Mitsubishi and Sumitomo. These zaibatsu capitalists operated basically as family-based and closed consolidations of several undertakings. Their pattern of accumulation was through diversified operations rather than accumulation by way of specialization in one specific industry. For instance, Mitsui had three major undertakings under its direct control: Mitsui Bussan, Mitsui Bank and Mitsui Mining, while Mitsubishi had as its mainstays Mitsubishi Mining, Mitsubishi Shipbuilding and Mitsubishi Marine Transportation.

Zaibatsu capital chose this pattern of accumulation based on diversified operations because during the time of primitive accumulation state capitalism had already inaugurated the key sectors of heavy industry. This pattern of accumulation through diversification became all the more solid as the sectors of political and military significance grew larger during the period of industrial revolution. As a result, with the notable exception of mining and shipbuilding industries, the zaibatsu interests were barely able to hold a grip on the heavy industrial sectors. They had to content themselves with controlling the light industrial sectors or the sectors of circulation including banks and trading companies.

In spite of this, the zaibatsu interests succeeded in making enormous profits as they managed to coax the emperor-dominated state into offering them all sorts of protection on a preferential basis. To cite some examples of the privileges they enjoyed, the business activities of Mitsui Bank in the period of industrial revolution were sustained by large sums of borrowings from the Bank of Japan. Mitsui Bussan was able to carry out business thanks to large sums of government and social funds mobilized on its behalf by Yokohama Specie Bank, Mitsui Bank, Daiichi Bank, and Shanghai Bank of Hong Kong. Mitsubishi enjoyed privileges of no less significance. Nippon Yūsen Kaisha and Mitsubishi Shipyard in Nagasaki were able to gain huge profits, thanks to preferential measures with regard to fund procurement that were prescribed under the Navigation Promotion Law and the Shipbuilding Promotion Law. In short, the zaibatsu interests were more dependent upon and much closer to the state power than other private interests.[6]

Third, the cotton spinning industry, along with the railways, was one of the industries that led Japan's industrial revolution. With exports of cotton yarn surpassing imports in 1897, the industry became competitive internationally. As early as 1903–04, on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War, the six largest spinning companies had solidly established themselves, prematurely gaining monopoly control over the spinning industry. The pattern of accumulation in the cotton spinning industry was characterized by a heavy reliance on external funds. Capitalists in this industry met their requirements for fixed capital (that is, equipment funds) by mobilizing the savings of merchants and landlords through the medium of joint stock companies. In the procurement of the liquid capital (funds for purchasing of raw cotton) they at first relied heavily on borrowings from banks, but eventually the supply of credits by trading companies in the form of cotton bills became much more popular. The excessively heavy reliance on external funds by the capitalists in the spinning industry meant that they had to meet heavy interest payments. But they managed to raise profits far in excess of that burden through forcing female spinning workers to do exhausting midnight labor at wages no better than those paid in colonial India. On behalf of the spinning industry, too, the state devised various sorts of politically motivated protection, even though these were not so generous as those enjoyed by the zaibatsu interests. The measures of protection included exemption from both the raw cotton import duty and the cotton yarn export duty, provision of subsidies to cargo ships running on the Bombay line under contract to carry cotton from India, and granting by the Bank of Japan and the Specie Bank of foreign exchange credits for import of raw cotton and export of cotton yarn and cotton cloth. It is therefore impossible to discuss the rapid growth of the Japanese spinning industry without referring to these measures of protection offered by the state.[7]

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6. Matsumoto Hiroshi, *Mitsui zaibatsu no Kenkyū* [A Study of Mitsui Zaibatsu] (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1979).

7. Takamura Naosuke, *Nihon bōsekigyōshi josetsu* [Introduction to the History of the Japanese Cotton Spinning Industry, vols. 1, 2] (Hanawa Shobō, 1971).

In brief, the electoral system consisted of different levels of representatives, with town and village assemblies situated at the bottom, proceeding up to the prefectural assemblies, the national Diet and the House of Peers. The interests of local men of influence (*meibōka*) was its axis and on that basis stood the power of the emperor system with the emperor at the peak of the pyramid.

Fourth, the silk reeling industry solidly laid its foundation in 1894, the year in which the production of mill-reeled silk surpassed that of hand-reeled silk. Outstripping Italy in terms of export in 1905 and China in 1909, the Japanese silk industry became the world's largest silk exporter. Unlike the spinning factories which were run in the form of joint stock companies, the silk mills were either private managements or family partnerships. The mills were able to meet their equipment expenses by themselves since the amounts involved were not so large, but they relied on raw silk wholesalers in Yokohama and local banks for the supply of funds for purchasing cocoons. Such borrowings took up a dominant portion of their liquid capital requirements. Furthermore, the silk reeling industry was subject to the control of the American silk fabric industry across the Pacific Ocean. This placed it in the unfavorable situation of being frequently troubled by violent changes in silk thread price which were out of their own control. Placed in such a situation, the silk-reeling industry was virtually without any assurance of making profits on a constant basis. The capitalists in the silk reeling industry made up for this particular weakness by forcing the cocoon raising peasants to supply their cocoons at an extremely low price, and forcing the silk-reeling female workers to do long hours of hard work for little pay.[8]

In contrast to the generous measures of protection the government took on behalf of the zaibatsu and the cotton spinning interests, the silk reeling industry had far more limited and indirect governmental protection. In the period from the 1890s through the 1900s, the government policy toward the sericulture industry was centered on the provision of politically-motivated financing (i.e., financial aid) to the raw silk wholesale merchants in Yokohama. In other words, the capitalists in the silk-reeling industry were "protected" only indirectly in the sense that the wholesalers, supported by government financing, made advance payments to them.

Here we see the difference in the intensity of class unity between capitalists in the cotton spinning industry and those in the silk-reeling industry. The bourgeoisie in the cotton spinning industry reorganized their Federation of Cotton Spinners' Associations in 1888, discarding its former appearance as a government-dictated organization and making it appear a more independent and horizontally structured organization. Thereafter, the Federation served on the one hand as a vehicle for implementation of industry-wide labor policies such as countermeasures against strikes and prevention of an excessive scramble for female workers by the spinning mills, and on the other hand it functioned as a lobbying organization vis-à-vis the government, successfully coaxing it into providing the set of protective policies mentioned above.

In contrast, the capitalists in the silk reeling industry, who were mostly small- and medium-sized capitalists located in the countryside, were unable to organize themselves on a nation-wide scale in this period. Rather it was the Silk Yarn Exporters' Association of Yokohama, an organization of the raw silk wholesale merchants, that represented the interests of the sericulture industry as a whole. In a way this reflects the weaker position vis-à-vis industrial capitalists of the silk reeling interests, depending as they did upon merchant capital.

The fifth category of capital was the weaving industry, which we shall touch on only in passing. Except for the limited cases in which cotton spinning companies were also active in weaving and looming operations, these operations were mostly carried out on the basis of farming-out by the piece under the control of weaver-merchants. Weaver-merchants directly rented out weaving materials to loom-workers, paid them at a piece rate, and received the cloth in return. What was characteristic of the weaving industry, furthermore, was that these weaver-merchants in turn were more or less dependent upon yarn dealers or local wholesale merchants. Because their membership was composed of different types of traders with varying interests, the trade associations of weavers lacked unity. Accordingly, they did not have much ability to pressure the state authority into taking important measures on their behalf. Compared with the capitalists in the cotton spinning and the silk-reeling industries, the capitalists in the weaving industry were more distant from state power and were able to acquire far less government protection. In that sense, capital operating in the weaving industry was the least privileged among the five categories of capital mentioned above.

We have examined several segments of the Japanese bourgeoisie with reference to the corresponding categories of capital. Clearly, the capitalists in the various industrial sectors in Japan were far from uniform. Capitalists formed a hierarchy in accordance with differences in the pattern of accumulation in each sector and differences in the degree of governmental protection each enjoyed. The zaibatsu capitalists stood at the top, followed by the capitalists of the cotton spinning industry, next the silk reeling industry and finally the weaving industry. In other words, the interests of the bourgeoisie were divided along the borders of industrial sectorse, making it impossible for the bourgeoisie in these sectors to join hands with each other across the boundaries of industries and form an autonomous class unity of the bourgeoisie as a whole.

Thus, the bureaucrats of the emperor system, in implementing policies that reflected the interests of the bourgeoisie, did not have to do anything other than organize from above the zaibatsu capitalists who stood at the top of the whole bourgeoisie and simply rely on them for full fledged cooperation. As a matter of fact, after the Sino-Japanese War, the bureaucrats began to solicit the opinion of the zaibatsu-affiliated capitalists by asking them to take part in various

8. Ishii Kanji, *Nihon sanshigyōshi bunseki* [An Analysis of the History of the Japanese Silk Industry] (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1972).

governmental consultative bodies. On their part the capitalists actively began to work upon politicians and bureaucrats through various channels, and to succeed in realizing their interests to some extent.[9]

Three such channels linked the bureaucrats and the zaibatsu interests. The first channel consisted of the various consultative bodies of the government such as the Supreme Conference of Agriculture, Commerce and Industry (1896–98) and the Currency System Investigation Committee (1893–95), both of which operated in the post–Sino-Japanese War period, and the Production Investigation Committee (1910–12) which appeared in the post–Russo-Japanese War period. Zaibatsu-affiliated capitalists were asked to sit in these consultative bodies as influential members. The second channel of communication between the bourgeoisie and the bureaucrats was provided by such organizations of the bourgeoisie as the Japan Economic Society (1897), the Society of Commercial and Industrial Economy (1900—created jointly by the Japan Economic Society and the Tokyo Society for Consultation on Commerce and Industry), and especially the Yūraku Club (1900), an organization of Tokyo-based zaibatsu capitalists. The third channel took the form of "private" and cozy relationships which business maintained with bureaucrats and politicians. These ties became especially important from around the Russo-Japanese War as the zaibatsu interests began to establish, on the private level, relationships by marriage with prominent politicians—Mitsui with Inoue Kaoru, Sumitomo with Saionji Kinmochi, Furukawa with Hara Takashi, and Mitsubishi with Katō Takaaki—and, on the collective level, a reliable channel with the bureaucrats in the form of the Ankō-kai (Anglerfish Eating Club) during the first Katsura administration and the Unagi-kai (Eel Eating Club) during the second Katsura administration.

In contrast, the cotton spinning interests, the second most important section of the bourgeoisie after the zaibatsu capitalists, rallied under the banner of the industry-wide association of their own, the Japan Federation of Cotton Spinners, submitting proposals to and petitioning the government in search of various measures of governmental protection on various issues. The channel between themselves and the government was not so solid as the ones the zaibatsu interests enjoyed. The silk-reeling and the weaving interests had hardly any reliable connection with the government. In addition to those we have mentioned above, other important associations of capitalists came into existence after the Sino-Japanese War such as prefectural Chambers of Commerce composed of local merchants and industrialists and the National Federation of the local Chambers. The activities of these organizations, for instance the submission of various proposals and petitions to the government, reflected chiefly the interests of the larger bourgeoisie of major urban centers, like Tokyo, Osaka, Yokohama, Kyoto, Kobe and Nagoya. Only the anti-Business Tax campaign of 1896–97 reflected the interests of the smaller bourgeoisie as well.

9. Nakamura Masanori, "Nihon shihonshugi kakuritsuki no kokka kenryoku" [State Power in the Period of the Establishment of Japanese Capitalism] in *Rekishigaku Kenkyū, bessatsu tokushu* 1970. Yamashita Naoto, "Ni-Shin Nichi-Rō senkanki ni okeru zaibatsu burujoajii no seisaku shikō" [The Zaibatsu Bourgeoisie and their Policies between the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars] in *Rekishigaku kenkyū* (November, 1977).

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John J. Stephan, professor of history at the University of Hawaii, is also the author of *Sakhalin: A History, The Kuril Islands: Russo-Japanese Frontier in the Pacific,* and *The Russian Fascists: Tragedy and Farce in Exile.*

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More than 100,000 Yen	7,382	0.46	41	0.0006
50,000–100,000 Yen	10,063	0.63	154	0.0023
10,000–50,000 Yen	85,212	5.36	5,208	0.08
1,000–10,000 Yen	503,067	31.63	255,086	38.27
400–1,000 Yen	436,413	27.44	701,709	10.53
200–400 Yen	259,897	16.34	919,144	13.79
Less than 200 Yen	288,328	18.13	4,784,440	71.78
Total:	1,590,362	100.00	6,665,782	100.00

Source: Prefectural Affairs Department, Home Ministry, "Table of Private Landed Property in Each Metropolitan Area and Prefecture," Home Ministry, 1886.

Various sections of the bourgeoisie had their own interests reflected in the will of the state in different ways and these differences formed a multiple-layered hierarchical structure, corresponding to the hierarchical relations among these sections themselve. The character of the Japanese bourgeoisie thus in turn provided a basis for the relative autonomy of the bureaucrats in the service of the emperor system.

There was another economically dominant class with no less significance than the bourgeoisie, the landlords. In the last decade of the nineteenth century the landlord class established its dominant position in Japanese rural society.[10] Like the bourgeoisie, the landlord class was internally stratified. According to the 1886 "Survey on Landowners by Class Strata," made by the Prefectural Affairs' Department of the Home Ministry (see table), forty-one landlords, possessing land valued at over 100,000 yen, occupied the top of the pyramid. Its base consisted of about 4,780,000 petty land owners with land valued at less than 200 yen. Thus, the farming class had a pyramidal structure.

This hierarchy of land ownership similarly shaped the political order of the village. The various electoral systems from the state level down to the village level show this quite clearly. Prior to the opening of the Imperial Diet in April 1889, the Town and Village Ordinance was enacted together with electoral systems for the selection of town and village assemblymen and assemblymen for prefectural and metropolitan district assemblies. This system of local self government accorded rights of participation in local government only to "citizens" (*kōmin*). To qualify as a *kōmin* one had to meet three conditions: 1) be a male house head over twenty-five years of age; 2) live in the same town or village for over two years; and 3) in order to qualify for the rights of suffrage and participation in town and village assemblies, pay a land tax or direct national taxes of over two yen. In short, the decisive qualification for becoming a *kōmin* was possession of a significant amount of property.

Moreover, the election of town and village assemblymen rested on a system of ranking and dividing electors into two different classes, an arrangement highly advantageous to owners of large amounts of landed property. The list of electors was drawn up corresponding to the amount of money that each paid in taxes. The top group, who paid over one half of the total amount of vifllage taxes, were designated as first-class electors. The remainder were made second class electors. Each group elected one-half of the total number of village assemblymen. Naturally, only first class landowners could become village chiefs or village assemblymen. Often they simply sent to the village assembly people directly under their influence, thereby further strengthening their own voice in village affairs.

The qualifications for prefectural assemblymen and national Diet members were extremely favorable to the upper strata of land owners. Suffrage rights for prefectural assemblymen and metropolitan district assemblymen were given only to those who paid over 5 yen in direct national taxes, chiefly the land tax. Eligibility rights were given to those who paid over 10 yen in direct national taxes. Both the suffrage and eligibility requirements for the Diet were limited to payers of over 15 yen in taxes. In 1890, payers of a land tax of 15 yen were either landed farmers or small landowners owning fields of about two hectares, so the overwhelming majority of men sent to the first Imperial Diets were landlords, people whose occupation was agriculture.

10. Nakamura Masanori, *Kindai Nihon jinushiseishi kenkyū* [A Study on Landlord System in Modern Japan] (University of Tokyo Press, 1979).

This particular mechanism of electoral representation lay behind the criticism that the early Diets were "landlord Diets." Although we speak of landlord Diets, the House of Representatives actually centered mainly on middle- and small-scale landlords. The stage for the activities of large-scale land owners was the House of Peers, which was composed of members of the imperial family, the court nobility, imperial appointees and those who paid large amounts of taxes. The Peers was the stronghold of the emperor system.

Large landlords entered the House of Peers on the basis of the "Large Taxpayers Membership System," thereby securing their voice in the control of national affairs. This system elected one Peer from each prefecture and metropolitan district. They were elected by mutual vote from among the top fifteen payers of direct national taxes (both land and income taxes).

In brief, the electoral system consisted of different levels of representatives, with town and village assemblies situated at the bottom, proceeding up to the prefectural assemblies, the national Diet and the House of Peers. The interests of local men of influence (*meibōka*) was its axis and on that basis stood the power of the emperor system with the emperor at the peak of the pyramid. The power structure established by the Imperial Constitution of 1889 and the Local Self Government Law was further stabilized after Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95. In particular, the establishment of the Seiyū Party in 1900 allowed the landlord forces to acquire their own political party and draw close to the bourgeoisie, becoming one wing of the bourgeois-landlord bloc.

Kiyoura Keigo, member of the House of Peers and prime minister in 1924, once remarked that "Although we made a good constitution, the fulfillment of its content is the main thing. Only after the establishment of the system of local self government did constitutional politics for the first time come fully into operation."[11] The landlord class, just like the bourgeoisie, was ranked politically by the size of its land holdings. Mediated by the system of local self-government, they supported from below the rule of the emperor system state over the localities.

Characteristic Features of the Form of the State under the Emperor System

A distinction between type of state and form of state must be made. Generally speaking, the state is above all a political organization of those in possession of the fundamental means of production, and as such, in any socio-economic formation, is "ordinarily a state of the most powerful and economically dominant class. This class, using the state as its own means, becomes also a politically dominant class, thereby obtaining new means for oppression and exploitation of the oppressed classes." (*Marx-Engels Werke*, 21. Bd., SS 166-67) The ancient state was basically characterized as a slave state which was nothing but a means of exploitation and oppression of the slaves by the slave holders, the feudal state as one based on serfdom, and the modern bourgeois state as a capitalist state (or as one based on wage labor). That is to say, the historical and class nature of a state is decided by what particular class interests it serves.

The concept "type of state" points to the class nature of the state in the sense above, but this is insufficient for clarifying the historically specific characteristics of an individual state. For instance, a bourgeois state might take any of a variety of forms from republican constitutional monarchy, or Bonapartist, to fascist. Just calling a certain state bourgeois without making any distinction between these various forms makes very little sense. In making a historical analysis of a state, therefore, it is imperative to pay special attention to the characteristics of the specific *form* it takes. What, then, is a "form of state"?

The form of state is a concept encompassing the mechanism by which the will of the state is decided and enforced on the population, and includes the manner as well as the mechanism by which the population is controlled ideologically. In other words, the essential task of the theory of the form of state is in clarifying which class is in possession of state power, and what is the specific form by which it organizes the various organs of the state so as to control the dominated classes. Studies of the emperor system undertaken in Japan have so far failed to realize the importance of this point and have given rise to unnecessary confusion. Below I will present in summary form my interpretation of the historical characteristics of the emperor system.

Japanese capitalism, as explained earlier, established itself in the period between 1900 and 1910 and at the same time transformed itself into imperialism. In keeping up with this change, the capitalist class climbed to the position of the economically dominant class, and state policies began to be devised and implemented faithfully reflecting the interests of the zaibatsu capitalists who stood at the peak of the bourgeoisie. The absence of such a situation prior to the Sino-Japanese War suggests that the class nature of the state under the emperor system turned into a bourgeois one. But what makes the discussion of the state under the emperor system difficult is that even though a change can be seen in the class nature of the state during the 1900s, a corresponding change cannot be seen in the form of the state that was consolidated with the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in 1899. On the contrary, during the same decade of the 1900s the absolutist framework of the state with the emperor at its top became all the more solid.

Constitutional scholars and historians in this country have long noted that the political position of the emperor under the Meiji Constitution was immensely strong. To be transmitted along an unbroken line of succession, the Imperial Throne was supposed to be sacred and inviolable. Under the prescriptions of Articles 6 through 16 of the Meiji Constitution, the following powers and functions of the state—which encompass virtually all the essential ones—resided in the emperor in a concentrated manner: sanctioning, promulgation and enforcement of laws (prescribed for by Art. 6); the right to convene, open, close, suspend and dissolve the Diet (Art. 7); the right to issue extraordinary Imperial ordinance (Art. 8); the right to mandate injunctions (Art. 9); the right to establish a government organization and to appoint and dismiss civil and military officials (Art. 10); the right of supreme command and organization of the Army and the Navy (Arts. 11 and 12); the right to declare wars and to conclude peace and treaties (Art. 13); the right to proclaim martial law (Art. 14); and the right to confer honors and orders and to grant Imperial amnesty (Arts. 15 and 16).

11. *Kōshaku Yamagata Aritomo Den* [Biography of the Duke Yamagata Aritomo, Vol. 2, p. 1042.] (Hara Shobō, 1969).

Moreover, the emperor exercised these Imperial powers as absolute and inviolable ones. One thing needs to be clarified here, the sense in which we mean that absolutism or an absolute monarchy is absolute. The answer in a word is that an absolute monarch is absolute in relation to the laws of the state, free from any form of legal restraint. There is neither any state machinery that is not based on his own will nor any that can oppose him. Seen from such a viewpoint, the emperor as defined by the Meiji Constitution was certainly an absolute being. As explained above, the sovereignty resided in him, and the final power of decision on the will of the state belonged to him, as far as the prescriptions of the Constitution were concerned. Of course this did not mean that the emperor made all the decisions himself and acted on his own. In the actual administration of the affairs of the state, especially in the decision of the will of the state made under the name of the emperor, both the elder statesmen—who were something like political advisors to the emperor—and the Privy Council—a consultative body to the emperor—played an important role. The elder statesmen, in spite of the fact that their existence was not prescribed for by the Constitution, had tremendous influence on important governmental policies. They took part in Imperial conferences, held their own meetings, personally expressed their opinions to the emperor, and, from time to time, even attended cabinet meetings. In the Meiji and Taishō eras, the elder statesmen had the *de facto* power to make decisions on important matters such as declaration of wars, conclusion of peace, and important affairs of personnel administration including appointment and removal of prime ministers.

In this way, under the Meiji Constitutional system, the state policies with the highest priority were made by the emperor and his close attendants such as the elder statesmen and the cabinet, with the Diet having only very limited power. Especially active among other state organs in the enforcement of the will of the state upon the ordinary people were the physical means of coercion such as the military forces, the police, the court, the prison and jails. All these state organs too were under the control of the emperor and were called the "emperor's military," the "emperor's police," the "emperor's court," etc.

This being the case, it was only to be expected that the state machinery as a whole, that is to say the composite whole of these state organs arranged in a systematic and well coordinated manner, was strongly absolutist. Moreover, this absolutist state machinery grew even more powerful following the Sino-Japanese and the Russo-Japanese Wars. For example, the so-called three laws pertaining to civil officials established in 1899—the Amended Civil Service Appointment Ordinance, the Ordinance Pertaining to the Status of Civil Officials, and the Ordinance Pertaining to the Discipline of Civil Officials—gave birth to powerful legal and institutional barriers against intervention into the bureaucratic machinery by the Diet and the political parties.

It was also during this period that the military bureaucrats gained further reinforcement of their relative autonomy. Important indices of this included: the establishment of the Naval General Staff Office in 1893, the institution of the practice of appointing Army and Navy Ministers from among officers in active service in 1900, the promulgation of the Military Command No. 1 in 1907, and the revision of the Ordinance Pertaining to the General Staff Office in 1908. All of these were meant to institutionally assure the military bureaucrats of their political supremacy over the cabinet and the Diet. These measures of adjustment and reinforcement of the machinery of the military bureaucrats were extended abroad for application in colonized Taiwan and colonized Korea as well. The emperor system countered the growing class awareness of the workers and the expansion of political parties inside Japan, and the evolution of the national resistance movements in the colonies by means of further reinforcing its absolutist state machinery.

This leads to the conclusion that although the state under the emperor system in the 1900s acquired a bourgeois nature, keeping pace with the transformation of Japanese capitalism into imperialism, the absolutist form of state remained intact. A bourgeois state (or a state under the control of the bourgeoisie and landlords) with an absolutist form—that was the historical substance of the emperor system at the formative period of Japanese imperialism.

A counterargument might be anticipated, one which maintains that, according to conventional understanding of the Marxian theory of state, the form of state is always determined subject to the concept superior to it, the type of state. If the Japanese state under the emperor system is regarded as a bourgeois state, its form should also be defined as that of a bourgeois state, or that of bourgeois constitutional monarchy. This is what the conventional theory of state and political sciences would have us believe. However, in the structure of the state under the emperor system as it was consolidated in the 1900s, the form of state and the type of state did not coincide. On the contrary, and quite characteristically, there was a divergence between them. This was the undeniable historical reality of the emperor system. We are thus obliged to re-examine from a new theoretical perspective the relationship between the form of state and the type of state. In the historical case of the Japanese state under the emperor system, the essential choice does not lie between the two alternatives, absolutism and imperialism. Rather, the problem is to clarify the structure of the paradoxical link between these two, the link in which the factors of absolutism became more and more conspicuous as Japanese capitalism entered the stage of imperialism. ★

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